

Wisconsin Urban Forestry Council Minutes

May 21, 2003

Rotary Gardens, Janesville

Attendance:

Voting Members: Bruce Allison, Linda Barcz, Jeff Edgar, Roald Evensen, Jeff Gorman, Laura Jull, Greg Lancaster, Dave Liska, Mike Maddox, Heather Mann, Ken Ottman, Joan Stevens, Dan Traas,

Ex-officio non-voting: Leif Hubbard, Dick Rideout

Guests: Wendy McCown (DNR, Director, Bureau of Forestry Services), Jim Warren (DNR, Chief, Forest Land Management Section and Dick's immediate supervisor)

Absent: Mark Dochnahl, Chris Giese, Wayne Glowac, Kevin Hinckley, Ken Keeley, Bob Skiera, Richard Welch, Joe Wilson, Lisa Burban, Bria Radtke

1. Call to order at 10:05

Members and guests introduced themselves

Motion to approve the minutes of the February meeting was made, seconded and passed

2. Council Budget

Dick Rideout presented the financial report, noting the expenditures for the Tree City USA banquet and the Home Products Show were within a few dollars of budget. Overall budget has a balance that will easily cover the final fiscal quarter.

Motion to approve the financial report was made, seconded and passed.

3. DNR Report

Dick Rideout reported that Joint Finance deleted \$100,000 per year of the urban forestry grant appropriation that had been added to the budget due to a clerical error. This maintains the appropriations at the normal level of \$529,900 per year. However the cut generated so much discussion on the benefits of the urban forest, initiated by Sen. Gwendolyn Moore (D-Milwaukee), that the co-chairs Sen. Roberta Darling (R-River Hills) and Rep. Dean Kaufert (R-Neenah) who moved to cut the funds, changed their votes and voted against their own motion! Dan Traas reported that this event was reported on an Appleton radio station with the reporter taking a pro-urban forestry stance. Dick is exploring ways to respond to this show of support.

On the other hand, Dick also reported that the DNR Secretary's staff didn't even know that the Urban Forestry Council existed despite the fact that the Secretary makes the appointments. Dick responded with information to the staff on the structure, make-up and function of the council. This challenges the council to be more visible.

Dick also reported that Southeast Region has hired an LTE, Kristina Skowronski, to help fill in for John Van Ells who is on extended medical leave. The approval process is under way to hire two LTEs for Dick and one or two for South Central Region to fill in for the vacant regional coordinator position. The regional position is on a list to be filled once the state budget is finalized. According to Wendy McCown, approval to start the hiring process is likely to be "sooner rather than later."

4. Emergency Storm Grant Proposal

Dick presented the issue brief. There was considerable discussion. Thoughts included:

- Restricting grants to Tree City USAs or giving Tree City USAs a larger amount – strong feelings both ways.
- Pro-rating the pool if more applied than funds available, rather than first come first served.
- \$75,000 doesn't buy many trees. \$100,000 suggested, but getting a history of events and communities involved was advised.
- A written communication from Lisa Burban expressed concern for having no match. She felt there should be a minimum match such as 10%. Others felt that no match was best given the emergency circumstances.
- The strongest concern about the proposal was the potential loss of all the urban forestry grant funds should there be a bad year or major storm in the large metro areas of the state. If the door is opened, lobbying or legislative pressure could force the use of more than the reserve. It was strongly urged that new money be used instead of reserving the existing grant appropriation. Others urged strong protection of the remaining funds to prevent their use in a bad year. A motion was made and seconded to approve the brief in concept with the charge that the DNR address these concerns. The motion passed with one vote against.

The council thanked the brief's authors for all the work that was done on this issue.

5. Forestry Communication and Education

• Forestry Education Center:

Wendy McCown, Director of the Bureau of Forestry Services, gave a presentation on the progress of the Forestry Education Center planned for the Milwaukee County grounds in Wauwatosa. Land purchase has been accepted pending state funding (stewardship funds are proposed). Wendy passed out design concept boards illustrating the idea of incorporating the building into the site with an outdoor classroom approach. The design for the site and the building, and the programming for the center are all open for input at this time and Wendy encouraged the council to become involved. Forestry has been working hard to address the concerns of related sites such as nature centers, the zoo, the domes, etc. It is DNR's vision to have the building built and run through a public-private partnership rather than having this a DNR operation.

• Forestry Communication and Education Strategic Plan Implementation

Wendy also describe the background of Forestry's C&E plan and the current plans for implementation. There will be further work to identify individual program needs, such as urban forestry. Again Wendy encouraged the council to get involved so that both what the council wants to do and what it wants DNR urban forestry to do are folded into the overall plan and are supported by it.

6. Inner-city grant funds

Dick requested input from the council on how best to spend the \$77,000 that the DNR will receive this year from the Forest Service in addition to its normal urban forestry grant. Proposals from DNR's Forestry Centennial coordinator as well as ideas from regional coordinators and city foresters were discussed. The council felt that folding the funds into the regular grant program with weight given to inner-city projects was the best way to stimulate innovative projects. However, it also liked the internal proposals, particularly bringing Tim Womick into the state for extended performances of The Trail of Trees. A motion to recommend that the DNR use \$20,000 for internal projects and fold \$57,000 into the grant program to fund inner-city applications was made, seconded and passed.

7. TCUSA Banquet Summary

Roald handed out a summary of the banquet and let that be his report. He indicated that the evaluations were good, confirming the council's opinion. Dick handed out an itemized list of banquet expenses. Though we are still waiting for the bill for Tina Schweitzer's travel, we are very close to the cost estimate of \$20,000. Roald is compiling a "cook book" on this event which will make future events much easier to plan and implement. The council expressed its enthusiastic gratitude for all the work that Roald has done on this project, which would not have succeeded without him.

8. Prioritization of Strategic Plan Implementation

Dick distributed a summary of the council members' priorities of the urban forestry strategic plan actions that the council itself should act on. The summary reflected responses of 10 council members. Of the top ten items, the first eight focused on public awareness. The next two related to the role of the council and expanding its influence. The extensive discussion that followed focused on these last two.

Members offered opinions of what the council should do and asked questions of what it's role should be. These included:

- The council should do one project a year and advise as needed.
- It should be a feedback forum. Are projects even appropriate?
- Where does the council have the most value?
- The council had very broad representation. Can it come up with a consensus?
- As it stands, the DNR could do fine without the council.
- The DNR needs to give the council its top 3 needs.
- Does the DNR set the agenda?
- What authority does the council really have?
- What do our organizations need from the DNR?

The council then asked for Dick's candid opinion of what role the council should play. Not surprisingly, he gave it:

The council should be THE advocate for urban forestry in Wisconsin. It should be telling the state forester, the DNR Secretary, the legislature, even the governor what should be done in urban forestry not just the lowly state UF coordinator. It should be asking the big questions such as "How can the DNR get 180 action items done in 5 years with what it has?", "Is urban forestry getting a big enough share of the pie?", "Is the DNR serving my constituency well enough?", "How can our organizations work together?". When Wendy McCown spoke about the forestry education center in Milwaukee, she mentioned the Governor's council on forestry several times, but never the urban forestry council. She should have been saying the urban forestry council asked for this, or the

urban forestry council wants that. The council members are powerful, busy people. Coming to a meeting and having lunch is not a good use of your time. You must exercise your power and advocate for urban forestry.

Council members reminded Dick that some of their attempts at this level of advising were met with bureaucratic barriers. Dick apologized for that and for often being that barrier. He suggested that the council question and challenge those barriers and find ways around them. This might even include changing council structure, becoming independent, etc.

Much discussion followed.

Action items:

- **Members should provide Dick with their comments on his concept of the “new” council.**
- The chair would still like input on the “homework” from the council members that did not respond. However the council agreed that assignment #1 – prioritizing 180 action items - was not useful. It was agreed to ask the council members to indicate their top 20 items that were most important to them to be achieved in the next 5 years. **Dick will send out that assignment.**
- The chair would also like assignment #2 – indicating the action items that the council itself should be involved in – completed by members who did not respond. **Dick will re-send this assignment.**
- **Dick should explore other state’s council structures and give an opinion on this council’s direction.**

9. New Business

National Urban Forestry Conference. The Forest Service is providing 3 scholarships to cover the cost of the registration for the National Urban Forestry Conference in San Antonio this September. Dick strongly suggested that the council send at least one if not two members with one being the vice-chair. Jeff Edgar concurred.

10. Future Meetings

- July 9th in Appleton (get together will follow the meeting at Dan Traas’s house)
- October 15th in the Madison area

Motion to Adjourn passed at 3:20

Rotary Garden Horticulturist Mark Dwyer gave council members a tour of the gardens.